

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Two Mattoon Men Charged in Connection With Kidnaping of Champaign Businessman**

Urbana, IL - Two Mattoon men were indicted by a federal grand jury today in connection with the kidnaping of a Champaign businessman, as announced by Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois. Francisco Antonio Villalobos, a/k/a Adrian Lopez, 32, and Terence E. Merritt, 18, were both charged in a two-count indictment with kidnaping Antonio Aguas-Navarro and with using and carrying firearms during the kidnaping. Both men have been in custody since their arrests on September 15, 2006. Following earlier hearings before United States Magistrate Judge David G. Bernthal in Urbana, the men were ordered held without bond pending trial. The men will be arraigned at a date still to be determined.

According to an affidavit filed earlier in the case by a special agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Aguas, who along with his brother, Ramiro, owns a number of La Bamba restaurants in Illinois, was reported missing on September 11, 2006. Later that day, Ramiro received a telephone call from an unknown person who claimed to be holding his brother. Ramiro, who was in Mexico at the time, was instructed to return to the United States at once. He was also told he would never see his brother again if he told anyone about the call. Over the course of the next four days, Ramiro received a number of calls from the kidnapers demanding a minimum of \$250,000 for the safe return of Antonio.

Eventually, on September 15, 2006, the kidnapers instructed Ramiro to drop off the \$250,000 ransom near a gas station in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Shortly after he did so, the affidavit alleges that Villalobos, a/k/a Lopez, picked up the ransom money and he was arrested a short time later with the money. According to testimony from earlier court proceedings, Merritt was arrested in a nearby motel room where he was holding Antonio.

The indictment resulted from an intense five day effort by the FBI and the Champaign Police Department to locate and rescue the victim following his abduction. Many other agencies assisted in the investigation including the following: Allen County, Indiana Sheriff's Department; Bloomington, Illinois Police Department; Illinois State Police; Indiana State Police; LaSalle County, Illinois Sheriff's Department; Mattoon Police Department; Normal Police Department; Peru, Illinois Police Department; Portland, Indiana Police Department; and the United States Marshals Service. Assistant United States Attorney Richard N. Cox is prosecuting the case.

(More)

U.S. Attorney Heaton stated, “The cooperation between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in this case has been extraordinary, and unquestionably led to the safe recovery of Mr. Aguas-Navarro. I commend their efforts.”

If convicted, the defendants face a maximum sentence of life imprisonment on each count. In addition, the firearms count carries a minimum sentence of at least seven years. Both counts carry up to a \$250,000 fine.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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